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NOTES ON THE SEFER HA-GALUY CONTROVERSY.

1. THE case against both the Cairene Ecclesiasticus and the Sefer Ha-Galuy seems to me to be absolutely settled by the answer of R. Hai Gaon on the subject of the verses cited in the Talmud as from the Written Books, which were not to be found in the Written Books. Hai Gaon is known to have “spread learning in Israel more than any other Gaon, and by his light the seekers of the Law walked from East to West. There was no such Gaon before him.” He was born in 969 A.D., twenty-seven years after Seadyah’s death. His father, R. Sherira, became Gaon in 968, and was contemporary with Seadyah for nearly forty years, and his neighbour for fourteen years. The idea that Seadyah could have discovered the original of Ecclesiasticus, and have heralded that discovery without the news thereof reaching the ears of Hai Gaon, may be summarily dismissed. Now Hai Gaon’s answer on the subject of one of the verses of Ben Sira quoted in the Talmud is printed in the Lyck *Responsa Gaonum*¹, and with a slight addition in the Livorno collection²; while an answer on the subject is also given in the Berlin collection³. I will give the Hebrew of the first two texts in extenso with translation.

ששאלתם הא דאמור רבנן בב'ק (צ'ב ב) דבר זה משולש בכתבונים
 כל עוף למיונו ישכון וננו ואינו בכתבונים. היכין הוא אלא רבנן סираה הם
 וכותבים היו [⁹¹] לפ' שהזכירו רבנן לכתוב מדבריו והם כתובים לראיות
 וענינים אבל לא בכתביו הקדושים ועוד רגילים רז"ל שאומרים טעם המקרא
 שלא בלשון הכתוב כדאמרין (שם פ'א ב) מהיות טוב אל תקרי רע ומקשין
 וכי כתיב כי הא נוענא ומהדרין כי הא דכתב אל חמנע טוב מבעליו
 והכא נמי כתיב הולך את חכמים וננו:

“And as to your question, whereas the Rabbis say in *Baba Kama*, 92 b, ‘This matter is repeated for the second time in the *Written Books*, Every fowl is at ease with its kind, and the son of man with his like,’ and this is not in the *Written Books*: *this is true*, but they are the words of Ben Sira, and they were written [inasmuch as our

¹ No. xxvii.

² Page 46 b.

³ Page 23 a.

⁴ The words in brackets are from the Livorno ed.

Rabbis were forced to write certain of his words, and they were written to serve as proof-passages and aphorisms], though not in the Sacred Books.'

Secondly, our Rabbis are accustomed to utter the sense of the Scripture, not according to the letter of the Scripture, as we say (*ibid.*, 81 b), 'From being good be not called¹ evil'; and we raise the objection, And is it written thus? to which we answer that it is a paraphrase of the text Prov. iii. 27. So too here the text which is paraphrased is Prov. xiii. 20."

The discussion in the Berlin edition deals with the citation in *Berachoth*, 48 a, on which see Rabbinowicz, *ad loc.* The Gaon, after certain other suggestions, proceeds: לא אמר שכך כתוב אלא אחר הפסוק שאף במשלי הכתוב הרי אמרו. "He did not say that it was *written* so, but after the verse of Proverbs he commences a fresh paragraph, as much as to say, 'and further this is *said* in the proverbs of the wise.'"

These answers would be utterly impossible on the supposition that the original of Ecclesiasticus was still in the possession of the Jews. Hai Gaon, when asked why the verse was said to be in the Written Books, could not have said *The verses of Ben Sira were once written, though they are not written now*; he must have replied, *The book of Ben Sira is in our possession as a Written Book*; and added, "the phrase 'Written Books' in the Talmud does not always mean Sacred Books." His reply, as it appears in the Lyck and Livorno editions, is to the effect that, when the Talmud was compiled, Ben Sira's verses were still occasionally *written*, so that the term is not inappropriate; or, he adds, the word *written* in the Talmud may refer not to Ben Sira's verse, but to the text of Scripture of which it is a paraphrase. In the Berlin collection the answer is to the effect that the word *written* in *Berachoth*, loc. cit., only refers to the words of Scripture, not to the part of the quotation that comes from Ben Sira.

Though I am sorry to differ from such authorities as Abrahams, Harkavy, and Schechter, on matters connected with Jewish literature, it seems to me unquestionable that the authority of Hai Gaon is preferable to theirs.

2. My reason for insisting on the date of R. Mubasshir's death was that this sort of demonstration is as certain as mathematics. If Harkavy and Bacher assert that Seadyah was just the man to mutilate his opponents' names and justify the act on the ground that God Almighty does the same—and this in a pamphlet in which he is defending himself against the charge of pretending to be a prophet;

¹ Pointed as *Nifal* in שׁר צְהַק.

just the man to complain of others mixing Hebrew with Aramaic¹, and to use a word from the Targum of Job in his first paragraph—it is difficult to convince them that the view they take of Seadyah's character is too low. I know him to have been too good, too wise, and too learned to have acted in these ways; but cannot force my conviction on those who think meanly of him. There can, however, be no doubt of the impossibility of a man reviewing a book after his death. Now the name Mubasshir or Mebasser is so rare that Grätz (v. 248) suggests that *Mekasser* should be read. That a Jew should have been called *Mebasser* at all seems a marvel. For the word *Mubasshir* means "Evangelist," and is so used by Christian writers of Arabic. Abu Bishr Matta, contemporary of R. Seadyah, and translator of Aristotle's *Poetics*, having mistaken the word *Pseudangelos* for *Evangelos*, renders it "Blessed Evangelist," using this word². Since nothing happens without a reason, it is clear that the associations connected with this word were what caused the copyists of Ibn Ezra's commentaries to omit the name. Naturally in a sentence in which Ibn Ezra records what the *Gaon* Mubasshir said against the *Gaon* Seadyah, *Gaon* must mean the same in both cases. Ibn Ezra could not have been guilty of so misleading a sentence as Harkavy puts into his mouth. But he may well have forgotten whether Mubasshir was a Priest or a Levite.

To R. Mubasshir's family there is an allusion in the Lyck collection of *Responsa*, No. vi. The sons of Kayyumi, says R. Amram, count as "a small Sanhedrin." Kayyumi was the name of R. Mubasshir's father. The name should mean "client" or "freedman of an Abd al-Kayyum."

3. R. Seadyah's mistake in writing Eleazar Ben Ira for Ben Sira in the Commentary on the *Sefer Yetsirah* seems to have left some curious traces. I rather think it was a point of honour among the Rabbanites when they cited the verse "Over what is too hard for thee ponder not" to pretend not to know whose verse it was. R. Bachya, the author of *Chobath Ha-Lebaboth*, who has a profound admiration for Seadyah, when citing this verse (ed. Warsaw, 1875, i. 88) calls the author "a certain sage"; but elsewhere he assigns the Talmudic citations from Ecclesiasticus (i. 248, ii. 112)—and he knows no others—to Ben Sira. Nachmanides, as has been seen, shows the same delicacy; and nothing happens without a reason. The reason was that Seadyah had been so severely handled in the mock Preface to the *Sefer Ha-Galuy* for this mistake.

¹ Of course I accept with thanks Bacher's explanation of the word "Nabataean."

² My *Analecta Orientalia*, p. 43.

4. I await with anxiety Harkavy's edition of the Arabic *Ma'asiyyoth*, but am convinced that R. Nissim of Kairawan was not the author. For R. Nissim of Kairawan was the mouthpiece of Hai Gaon, as appears from the words in Neubauer's *Chronicles*, i. 73. "R. Nissim received instruction from Hai Gaon, who loved him much, and sent letters to him answering all his queries off-hand, and from Nissim did R. Samuel the Levite drink of the waters of Hai Gaon." Now in the Lyck collection of *Responsa*, No. lxxxi, Hai Gaon declares that there is no question whatever that Esther is one of the Sacred Books. But the author of the *Ma'asiyyoth* expressly excludes Esther from the list of Sacred Books. Therefore the author of the *Ma'asiyyoth* is not Nissim of Kairawan, as indeed Rapoport (*B. H.*, xii) was inclined to suspect.

5. From Harkavy's collection of *Responsa*, p. 97, as well as from other sources, it appears probable that the *H. G.* was known and regarded as an authority in Seadyah's time. Supposing the Warsaw text of this book to be right, then we learn from it that the elders of the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai wrote the *Megillath Antiochus*. How then can Seadyah have asserted that Judas Maccabaeus and his brethren wrote it? In addition to his other errors must we accuse him of thinking Judas Maccabaeus and his brethren elders of the Houses of Hillel and Shammai?

6. That we should write Seadyah, not Saadyah, appears from a verse in the Wafir metre in the Bodleian MS. d. 65:—

כְּתָב בְּאַמְפָאַת צָעֵן בְּשֶׁם אִישׁ
שְׁמוֹ חַסְדֵּר אַלְיִ דָדוֹ סְעִירִה

And in the Bodleian copy of the original of R. Bachya's work, cited above, it is pointed in the same way.

7. I ought to have made some acknowledgment of the courteous tone adopted by Harkavy in his answer. How I wish he had been less courteous, but accepted my result!

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